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Understanding Malaysian ESL Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and Learning through Metaphors

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Abstract

Teaching metaphors are often used in teacher education programmes for pre-service teachers to critically reflect on their teaching. Metaphors not only give insights into teachers' beliefs and principles about teaching and learning but may also guide classroom practices. This article sought to explore three Malaysian ESL pre-service teachers' teaching metaphors in different situations during their teaching practicum. The study also explored what the selected metaphors revealed about the pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs. Data in this study was collected qualitatively by using semi-structured interviews and reflective tasks assigned after the pre-service teachers' teaching practicum at local government schools. Findings indicated that the pre-service teachers have multiple roles, which are represented by various metaphors they formulated in different situations. It has been suggested that metaphors can be effective in eliciting beliefs as the constructed metaphors reveal much about the roles of the pre-service teachers. The major beliefs about teaching and learning generated by the research participants include meeting students' needs, varying teaching approaches, and facilitating students. The implications of this study are for teacher educators to utilize metaphors in teacher education programmes and to acknowledge pre-service teachers' beliefs as this may highly impact their practices and development.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers, teaching metaphors, teacher cognition, pedagogical beliefs, teaching concepts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A metaphor is used by giving symbolic meanings to familiar words through figurative comparisons (Uchida et al., 2019). In the context of teaching, metaphors produced by teachers may enable them to understand themselves as teachers better. Scholars generally agree that teaching metaphors do not only provide insights into teachers' thinking but can also outline the roles, responsibilities, and individual identity of the teachers in unique ways (Erickson & Pinnegar, 2017).

Identity is a vital part of teacher education as pre-service teachers bring their personal beliefs into the teacher education programme, which will later be shaped by experts in the field of teaching (Nghia & Huynh, 2017). One way to attain the understanding of pre-service teachers' identity is by analysing the metaphors they choose to describe themselves. The metaphor was used in this study as it is considered as "an important instrument of analysis" in educational research aiming to understand teachers' roles (Oxford et al., 1998, p. 45). From this research, pre-service teachers can identify their beliefs about teaching and learning through a critical reflection of metaphors. The ability to critically reflect on oneself is an important skill to be acquired by teachers to meet the challenges of this knowledge society, and as Farrell (2006) states, the opportunity for pre-service teachers to identify their teaching metaphors does help them.

Many researchers support the idea that teachers, especially new teachers, should reflect upon their classroom practices (Barnard & Burns, 2012; Larrivee, 2008). The process of reflection will empower the pre-service teachers to improve their skills as well as will allow them to gain a deeper understanding of their teaching. Another significance of the study is that understanding teachers' attitudes and beliefs may not only provide pieces of evidence for teachers' thinking but also classroom practices, teaching approaches, and ideas about their professional development, which will play a substantial role in shaping what their students learn and how they learn. Lin (2012) claims that TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) teachers may have attitudes and beliefs about many aspects of their teaching including the subject matter, teaching methods, and what constitutes a good teacher and student.

In the Malaysian context, several studies on teachers' beliefs and identity using quantitative methods were found (Bakar et al. 2012; Khairani & Razak, 2010; Yunus et al., 2013). Studies using qualitative methods by using interviews and document analysis are very scarce. One of the limited studies conducted locally is a case study of 74 trainee teachers' teaching conceptions. The study found four central metaphors characterising the trainee teachers' conceptions of teaching, which include teachers as facilitators, motivators, edutainers, and kinship (Hasim et al., 2013). This study, however, only asked research participants to select one metaphor that can best represent themselves rather than metaphors employed in different circumstances during their practicum. Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. However, this study, although was done in the Malaysian context, was of a different focus as it analysed the metaphors students use to describe their language teachers rather than metaphors adopted by teachers. Due to these gaps in the research area, particularly in the Malaysian context and the value of metaphors in understanding teachers' beliefs, there is a need to conduct more studies on metaphors that pre-service teachers use to describe themselves in different

circumstances to generate a better understanding of teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices. Specifically, this study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What are the teaching metaphors adopted by the Malaysian ESL pre-service teachers?
2. What do the selected metaphors suggest about the pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Metaphors in Teacher Education

Studies related to the use of metaphors in teacher education have started long ago since the 1980s. Based on various functions of teaching metaphors, it is worth to study the metaphors that emerge when teachers express themselves to understand the teachers' thinking content (Munby, 1986). Calderhead and Robson (1991) similarly state that through metaphors, teachers can "summarize, at a high level of abstraction, the way [they] think" (p.3). Oxford et al. (1998) yielded a typology that comprises of four perspectives of teaching which are social order (i.e., teacher as a manufacturer, teacher as a competitor), cultural transmission (i.e., teacher as a conduit, teacher as a repeater), learner-centred growth (i.e., teacher as a nurturer, teacher as an entertainer) and social reform (i.e., teacher as an acceptor, teacher as a learning partner).

Guerrero and Villamil (2002) studied the metaphors of 22 ESL teachers. The study generated 28 metaphors which are conceptualized into categories such as teacher as a co-operative leader (coach, trail guide, movie director), as a provider of knowledge (moon, wire in a thick wall, television set), as a challenger/ agent of change (window to the world, shooting star, lion-tamer), as a nurturer (bee, gardener, Mother Nature), as an innovator (explorer, convertible car), as a provider of tools (tool carrier), as an artist (potter), as a repairer (mechanics of the mind), and as a gym instructor (a person starting an aerobics class). The strength of the study was it emphasized the influence of sociocultural factors in the teachers' metaphor conceptualizations where "the personal experience of the teachers and a multiplicity of social voices come into play" (Guerrero & Villamil, 2002, p. 116). However, the limitation is that the study only reported what teachers said and did not observe the teachers' practice.

Later research being conducted has mainly concluded that metaphor was a significant part of teacher education and teacher identity. One of the reasons is because metaphors help to understand teachers' personal experiences through the insights about complex concepts of teaching and learning, and metaphors provide "a framework to assess teaching and a means for teachers to augment self-awareness and professional development" (Lin et al., 2012, p. 184). Another study that had mainly employed metaphor as a part of the research is a case study conducted by Hasim et al. (2013). The study examined pre-service teachers' teaching metaphors, and how these metaphors related to conventional conceptions of teaching. This study revealed that the four common conceptual metaphors adopted by the pre-service teachers were teachers as facilitators, teachers as motivators, teachers as entertainers, and teachers as family members. The study highlighted that metaphors "provide insights to teacher trainers as to how teachers, whether novices or more experienced professionals perceive their roles as teachers in terms of other relatable roles" (Hasim et al., 2013,

p.76), and metaphors were also significant as teachers can use them to further develop themselves by reflecting on the traits the metaphors carried or described. More recent evidence also reveals the importance of metaphor on teacher identity, as concluded by [Ahmad and Samad \(2018\)](#). Through self-constructed metaphors, the sole participant of the case study who was an experienced teacher in Malaysia managed to widen her perspective of teaching and helped her to critically explore herself through the process of reflective practice.

According to [Farrell \(2006\)](#), examining metaphors that pre-service teachers use during their practicum is beneficial as it is one of the ways to make the pre-service teachers' prior knowledge and beliefs more explicit. Allowing the pre-service teachers to identify their teaching metaphors can initiate change if their prior knowledge and beliefs conflict with the curriculum presented in the teacher education courses. This opportunity to reflect will help the pre-service teachers to be critical ([Farrell, 2006](#)).

In 2016, Farrell conducted a longitudinal study over two years on three ESL teachers' beliefs using [Oxford et al. \(1998\)](#) metaphor analysis. The participants generated a total of 94 metaphors that were collected from group discussions and interviews. It is clear from the study that reflective practices using metaphors may reveal about the teachers' beliefs. It should also be noted that these metaphors are dynamic and may often change if the beliefs are challenged by different teaching and learning contexts ([Farrell, 2016](#)).

2.2 Beliefs and Teacher Education

According to [Borg \(2011, pp. 370-371\)](#), beliefs are defined as “propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change”. In other words, beliefs are said to be very subjective, implicit, and unique for every individual. Beliefs may sometimes be unspoken but will be exhibited through actions.

One of the earliest established beliefs in the pre-service teachers' life is their experience as a learner, and this belief is resistant to change ([Borg, 2003](#)). [Borg \(2003\)](#) adds that teachers' pre-existing beliefs may not only be influential during the teacher education programme but also throughout their teaching career, particularly if left unexamined and unchallenged. This is because such beliefs act as filters that guide the way the pre-service teachers take in new inputs ([Borg, 2006](#)). Furthermore, there is evidence denoting how some teachers' beliefs may be permanent even if they are proven to be incorrect or inappropriate during teacher training ([Pajares, 1992](#)). Therefore, teacher training institutes must consider teachers' well-established beliefs about teaching and learning before they start the teacher education programme. It is also important to understand that the success of teacher training programmes does not necessarily depend on whether or not they can alter the beliefs of the pre-service teachers aligned to the content of the programmes since the pedagogical knowledge of pre-service teachers is highly subjective and contextual. As [Borg \(2003, p. 81\)](#) summarizes, teacher cognitions and practices are “mutually informing”. In this sense, the term teacher cognition used refers to unobservable dimensions of teaching, specifically what teachers know, believe, and think. Hence, we know that teachers' beliefs are shaped and influenced by the multitude of factors that may or may not be noticed.

The amount of research available worldwide, examining the influence of teacher beliefs on the way they act in classrooms, is substantial. The role of teachers greatly varies as they have to prepare lessons, manage students' behaviour, make on-the-spot decisions, motivate students, establish relationships with students and many others, and how teachers play these roles to a great extent is determined by their beliefs. One local study portrayed how beliefs influence pedagogical practice. [Hasim et al. \(2013\)](#) conducted a study on 72 trainee teachers at a selected higher learning institution in Malaysia. The study revealed that 36% of the participants believed that teaching and learning in an ESL classroom should be collaborative and student-centred. Hence, they adopted the "facilitator" role as it can best represent their pedagogical beliefs. Other participants adopted categories, which are motivators, edutainers, and family members (i.e., big sister, brother, mother).

There is also a recent trend where case study methods are used to study teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practice. [Debreli \(2012\)](#) explored changes in three pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching. The study revealed that the three teachers initially had similar beliefs about what an effective foreign language teaching should be like, but after getting more exposure to the training programme and teaching in real classrooms, the pre-service teachers' beliefs seemed to partially change. [Farrell and Ives \(2014\)](#) employed a case study to explore one language teacher's beliefs and classroom practices. This study is unique as it uses classroom observation as one of the data collection methods in addition to interviews and journal writing. It was discovered that the participant's beliefs were mostly consistent with classroom practices. Teacher educators should also allow pre-service teachers to articulate their beliefs. Furthermore, [Barrot \(2016\)](#) also conducted a case study on five experienced ESL teachers' beliefs to see whether the beliefs are consistent with the sociocognitive-transformative perspective. This study discovered that all the teachers adhere to principles such as the focus on learner-centredness, transformative learning, and pedagogical principles. Additionally, beliefs were generally found to be consistent with practices.

Based on this review of literature, researchers have mainly concluded that teaching metaphors are an integral part of teacher education in generating a better understanding of teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. This current study should be able to add more insights into the existing literature on teaching metaphors.

3. METHOD

3.1 Respondents

The participants of the study were three pre-service teachers studying in their fourth year of Bachelor of Education (Teaching English as a Second Language) in a Malaysian public university. These teachers were recruited because they had completed their teaching practicum at different government schools, they had prior English learning experience (both primary and secondary) in Malaysia and finally, they represent different gender and race for the purpose of research diversity. Participants were labelled with pseudonyms to avoid identification, for example, PT1, PT2, and PT3 where 'PT' denotes pre-service teachers.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Reflective task

The participants were given a reflective task upon returning from their practicum. The task was sent to them via email. The four sections in the task are listed below:

1. Describe a problematic situation or dilemma you had to face during your teaching practicum.
2. Describe a situation that you felt very successful during your teaching practicum
3. Choose ONE metaphor that can generally describe your role as a teacher during your practicum.
4. Now that you have completed your teaching practicum, choose ONE metaphor that can represent the kind of teacher you want to be in the future.

For each section, participants were guided with sub-questions to assist them in producing their metaphors, describing, and explaining the metaphors concerning their beliefs and practices.

3.2.2 Interview protocol

Questions used in this interview were adapted from [Thomas and Beauchamp \(2011\)](#). The interview was conducted on a one-to-one basis to give some privacy to the respondents to share information and to reveal more information about their beliefs. Semi-structured interviews were used with topics and issues to be covered determined by the researcher, which include Section A (Questions on Teacher's Background) and Section B (Questions on How the Chosen Metaphors relate to Teacher's Beliefs).

3.3 Procedures

Figure 1 illustrates an overview of data collection. This figure was used only as a guideline for the researcher, and the researcher was aware that some stages of data collection did happen simultaneously.

After the students had returned from their practicum, the researcher informed the students studying in the fourth year of the Bachelor of Education (TESL) programme about her intention to conduct a study. Students who met the criteria and were interested to participate in the study were given a consent form. The task to reflect on the practicum experience was emailed participants a few days after they had signed the consent form. They were allowed to complete the task at home, allocating more response time.

The participants' responses were returned to the researcher within one week after the task being distributed. Following the reflective task, each pre-service teacher's written response was examined. The three pre-service teachers were asked to participate in a one-on-one interview held in an office "to make sense of the comments made by an individual" ([Cameron & Low, 1999, p. 89](#)). The interview was conducted approximately two weeks after they had completed their reflective task to allow the researcher to read the participants' responses. The interviews were voice-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for the data analysis purposes.

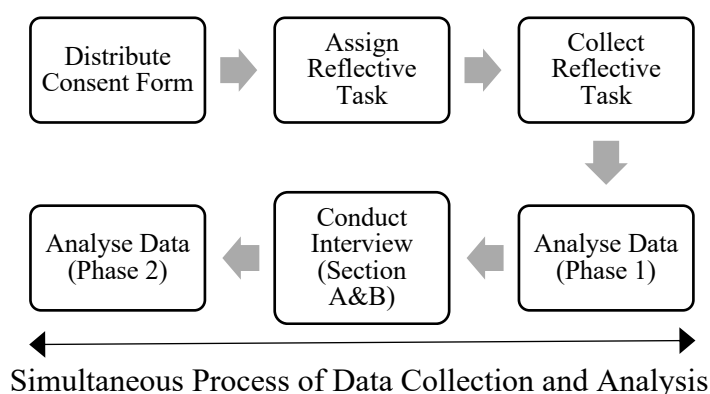


Figure 1. Data collection procedures.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted twice as seen in Figure 1. However, it should be noted that these stages were not linear, and the process of data collection and data analysis of this study were conducted simultaneously.

For the first research question, the researcher listed the pre-service teachers' metaphors and reasons for the selection. Data analysis Phase 1 was done by analysing the pre-service teachers' responses in the reflective task. Because of the small sample, the researcher recursively examined and re-examined the participants' reasons behind their choice of metaphors. Common elements were observed to code the metaphors into themes representing teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning.

Next, thematic analysis was used to answer the second research question. Since qualitative research demands the most accurate understanding and interpretation of people's actions and thoughts, thematic analysis is best as it allows us to understand the potential issues widely. The three main components of [Miles and Huberman's \(1994\)](#) model for thematic analysis were applied involving data reduction, data display, as well as drawing and verifying conclusions. Data reduction means reducing the information collected from both reflective task and interview through editing, summarizing, and segmenting by coding and putting them into themes and sub-themes representing beliefs such as positive and negative attitudes towards teaching, qualities of a good teacher, and teaching conceptions such as meeting students' needs, and varying teaching approaches. Then, information obtained throughout the process of data analysis was displayed in an Excel sheet. The last component is drawing and verifying conclusions in the form of justifiable statements or assertions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Pre-service Teachers' Teaching Metaphors

Table 1 provides a summary of metaphors the pre-service teachers deduced with different circumstances. The circumstances adopted include problematic situations, successful situations, general situations, and envisioned teacher self. Problematic situations can refer to any problematic situations the pre-service teachers encounter

during their teaching practicum involving the students, teachers, school setting, and others. Successful situations refer to situations during their teaching practicum that the pre-service teachers can be proud of, meanwhile, general situations refer to situations that the pre-service teachers usually encounter. Finally, envisioned teacher self refers to the pre-service teachers' vision of the kind of teacher they would like to be in the future.

Table 1. Pre-service teachers' teaching metaphors.

	PT1	PT2	PT3
Problematic Situations	Gardener	Explorer	Police Officer
Successful Situations	Chameleon	Nurse	Magician
General Situations	Captain of a Ship	Entertainer	Police Officer
Envisioned Teacher Self	Mighty Oak Tree	Star	Parent

4.1.1 PT1's metaphors

PT1 represented herself with the metaphors of a 'gardener', a 'chameleon', a 'captain of a ship', and a 'mighty oak tree'. PT1 highlighted the similarities between a teacher and a gardener as the latter has "the arduous task of tending to every plant in the garden which requires different necessities to bring out the best in the plant – beautiful flowers". Some of the roles that she had to play during her practicum were meeting students' needs, putting a lot of sacrifices and efforts to bring out the students' potential, and allocating a generous amount of time to plan engaging lessons for her students.

It is interesting to note that PT1 viewed herself differently when she felt successful. She described herself as a 'chameleon' when she managed to successfully transform a mundane class to a participative class, "just like how chameleons can transform their colours." She believed that a teacher had to demonstrate flexibility in making lessons fun and interesting to engage students better.

Although PT1 believed that teachers should prioritize students, PT1 outlined that the metaphor a 'captain of a ship' fits her best as she also believed in the importance of teacher-control "to be able to steer students towards the right path." A captain of a ship similarly has to be skilful to ensure that it reaches its destination safely despite the condition of the sea. Teachers also have to "ensure that students get through the path of education unscathed no matter what difficulties they may face."

At the same time, she noted that she wanted to be a teacher who discovers knowledge to be shared with her students in the future. Like a mighty oak tree, it continues to give shades to others and can be used in many other ways. PT1 indicated that "We must ground ourselves in knowledge and send our roots out just like the oak tree to obtain new knowledge." In other words, she wanted to be a teacher who has a thirst for new knowledge and skills to improve her students' education standards.

4.1.2 PT2's metaphors

PT2's perceptions of teaching were shaped by four different metaphors: 'teacher is an explorer', 'teacher is a nurse', 'teacher is an edutainer', and 'teacher is a star'.

PT2 explained that she did encounter problems or dilemmas during her practicum, particularly in her first week of teaching, where she had problems in finding ways on how to engage her students. She commented, "there was an element of

uncertainty and unpredictability” as she was unsure of what teaching style suits her students best. Therefore, she had to be “adventurous and bold” and presented a “reassuring persona” to overcome her uncertainties.

The metaphor she constructed to represent her role in a problematic situation was an ‘explorer’. She mentioned, “teaching a class of students whom you are unfamiliar with is like exploring uncharted waters” due to the unpredictability of the situations that she had to face in class and before entering the class. Sometimes the exploration could both be exciting and daunting, and this is when the teachers had to be brave.

Besides an explorer, she created another metaphor to illustrate the role that she had to play in a successful situation during her practicum, particularly when she was given a note on her last day of school from a student deemed by other teachers and classmates as “a social outcast”. The student ran to her and thanked her for being such a caring teacher. In this circumstance, she felt that she had to play the role of a counsellor and a friend to solve the student’s personal issues. Her initiative changed the student from being a secluded student to a high performing student. This mimics the role of a ‘nurse’ who has to be caring for her patients and also provide emotional support to them. PT2 stated that:

PT2 Teachers need to ensure that students are at an emotionally stable state before they can proceed to learning content in class. It also helps when a teacher takes the initiative to care for the students as this will almost always resonate with students and foster a new interest in your subject.

Furthermore, PT2 generally viewed herself during her practicum as an ‘entertainer’ who believed in the need to foster students’ interests. She wrote that to gain students’ attention, teachers should make sure that the students are entertained in a class by planning fun activities such as word games, skits, and treasure hunts. PT2 even brought a guitar to class to capture the students’ interest in learning English.

PT2 envisioned herself as a teacher who “selflessly burns bright into the darkest of nights to lead sailors in the past when stars were used for navigation”. Hence, the metaphor that she has chosen to represent herself was a ‘star’. She saw herself as a teacher who is willing to sacrifice to “lead [her] students beyond the horizon to reach their full potential”. The role of the teacher, for her, is to facilitate and guide the students, just like how stars exist as the guiding light and compass for explorers.

4.1.3 PT3’s metaphors

PT3 listed three different metaphors: a teacher as a ‘police officer’, a ‘magician’, and a ‘parent’. According to his reflective task, this teacher put himself as a person who had the voice of authority, mainly when he had to handle difficult situations like managing the students’ behaviour. He encountered a situation where two boys in his class started punching each other. He had to reprimand the students and send them to the discipline teacher “to provide a conducive environment for the [other] students to learn.”

In successful situations, PT3 described himself as a magician. For instance, he managed to control the students when taking them to watch a movie, although many teachers in the school thought the act was impossible “as the students might go haywire”. PT3 felt successful as he managed to keep the students under control by

giving them a task sheet that they had to answer while watching the movie and assisted them in answering the questions. Apart from meeting the lesson objectives, the students also enjoyed the lesson.

PT3 believed that he could generally describe his role as a teacher during his practicum using the metaphor 'a teacher as a police officer'. This is because he taught in an all-boys school where the students were known to be disruptive. Although he mentioned that he was unhappy to be the voice of authority, he needed to optimize control to ensure that his class was manageable, and the students could learn with minor disruptions in class.

According to PT3, he has chosen 'a parent' to describe his envisioned teaching metaphor. Although he had to be an authoritarian teacher when he was doing his practicum, he believed that an ideal teacher is a teacher who can love his students just like they are his children. He believed that all students should be treated equally regardless of their ethnic diversity and personal backgrounds, and with that, "no students should be given less attention in class or outside the class."

To summarize, the metaphors the pre-service teachers adopted vary depending on different circumstances. All the pre-service teachers have unique metaphors, which in many ways, do reflect their personal beliefs and practices.

4.2 Metaphors Concerning Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Table 2 summarizes the pre-service teachers' beliefs and practices about teaching categorized into five teaching conceptions: meeting students' needs, varying teaching approaches, facilitating students, equipping self with knowledge, and managing students.

Table 2. Teaching conceptions based on metaphors.

Teaching Conceptions	Participants' Metaphors				
	PT1	PT2		PT3	
Meeting students' needs	Gardener	Explorer	Nurse	Police Officer	Parent
Varying teaching approaches	Chameleon	Explorer	Entertainer	Magician	
Facilitating students	Captain of a ship	Star			
Equipping self with knowledge	Mighty Oak Tree				
Managing students	Police Officer				

From the five prominent themes produced, it is interesting to note that all the pre-service teachers believe in the importance of meeting students' needs regardless of the metaphors of their choice in the reflective task. This belief is depicted by five metaphors: 'gardener', 'explorer', 'nurse', 'police officer', and 'parent'. With the 'gardener' metaphor, PT1 believed that she needed to be sensitive to every individual student's needs by giving them what they need to "bring out their talents and other strengths". PT2 similarly pointed out that her 'explorer' metaphor reflected her belief that the students' needs should be prioritized, and teachers should shape her lessons based on what the students needed. From her 'nurse' metaphor, she believed that teachers should take care of students' well-being, and this belief was also reflected

during her teaching practicum in which she managed to play the role of a counsellor and a friend by taking the initiative to ask about one of her students' personal problems. Due to her initiative, the student successfully changed from being a secluded student to being a top performer in class. PT3, also, believed that he needed to manage the students' behaviour to provide a conducive environment for his students to learn.

Another common belief extracted from the metaphors is the belief that teachers should vary their teaching approaches to engage students in learning. This belief is depicted by the metaphor 'chameleon', 'explorer', 'entertainer', and 'magician'. As PT1 mentioned, she represented herself with the metaphor 'chameleon' because she thinks that a teacher should be able to "transform" classes and create engaging lessons, just like how a chameleon can transform its colours. She also mentioned in the interview that a good teacher is someone who dares to make enjoyable lessons by not merely relying on textbooks. During her practicum, she managed to create engaging lessons by not following the curriculum rigidly and not doing "mundane activities". PT2 similarly mentioned that, as an explorer, teachers should be "willing to explore and try out new methods of teaching, albeit some may even be perceived as unconventional," such as using technology in the classroom and not only relying on what is deemed safe to avoid predictable and mundane lessons. She also highlighted the belief that teachers have to be creative and innovative by creating materials that can cater to students with different proficiency levels and learning styles to "garner their attention". During her practicum, she tried many different methods to gain her students' attention and ensure that her students are entertained. PT3 also commented that a teacher "should be able to make ways for students to learn" by implementing various ways of teaching English. He took risks during his practicum by bringing his students to the audio-visual room to watch a film, although teachers in that school regarded it as a taboo. Because he was successful in managing his students, he regarded himself as a 'magician'.

Both PT1 and PT2 have a strong belief that a teacher has to facilitate students. PT1, for instance, represented herself with the metaphor 'captain of a ship' because she believed that a captain of a ship required certain skills to guide students towards the right path. According to PT1, teachers should facilitate their students "to ensure that students get through the path of education unscathed no matter what difficulties they may face". From the 'explorer' metaphor, PT2 highlighted that a teacher had to be brave to endure challenges to assist her students in improving themselves. PT2 also used the 'star' metaphor to represent the kind of teacher she wants to be in the future. As she put it, the teacher acted as "a guiding light and compass" who may appear to have a dominant role, but eventually, the students themselves are "the true stars and they alone can change their own fates in life".

From the 'police officer' metaphor, PT3 highlighted the role of managing students' behaviour. According to him, he had to be strict in certain circumstances so that his students knew that he had the authority. Although he was unhappy with the different characters that he had to project, he felt that his action was necessary to ensure that other students could learn in a conducive environment.

The 'mighty oak tree' metaphor chosen by PT1 depicts the belief that a teacher has to always be equipped with knowledge. In her reflective task, she highlighted the fact that she always had to ensure she had something new to present in class since her students were well-read. Without valuable and engaging lessons, her high-achieving students would not have the interest to learn.

4.3 Discussion

From the various teaching metaphors that the pre-service teachers constructed, it was learned that pre-service teachers had multiple roles during their teaching practicum, and these roles will likely depend on the circumstances that arise in their school setting. In problematic and successful situations, the pre-service teachers chose to portray themselves with different metaphors that entail different characteristics. This finding is in agreement with [Farrell \(2016\)](#), who emphasises the importance of having teaching metaphors challenged and new metaphors developed depending on the relevance of the previously generated metaphors in different contexts and circumstances.

Another finding of this study is that the pre-service teachers derived their beliefs through a combination of various experiences. It should be noted that all the pre-service teachers come from different backgrounds, which may affect their choice of metaphors and beliefs. The unique profiles of the research participants may suggest that there could be many factors which may have contributed to the formation of their metaphors and beliefs such as ethnicity, gender, school, and home environment. The role of context, in particular, was significant as “teachers’ psychological functions, skills, competence, knowledge, and attitudes toward students are shaped in the context in which they are teaching” ([Shabani & Ewing, 2016, p. 8](#)). It was surprising to find that the type of school assigned to the pre-service teachers for their practicum influenced their beliefs. This study supported the notion that there are many factors which may influence teachers’ beliefs once they have gone through the teaching practicum. As [Borg \(2003, p. 81\)](#) notes, “teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs”.

With respect to the second research question, it was found that the pre-service teachers in this study had certain common beliefs. All of the participants prescribed to learner-centredness as they acknowledged the importance of meeting students’ needs, varying teaching approaches, and facilitating students. These learner-centred roles reflect one of [Oxford et al.’s \(1998\)](#) typology of metaphors based on four perspectives of teaching, specifically ‘Learner-Centred Growth’ referring to students’ interests being the focus of schooling. As stated by PT2, a teacher had to play the role of a counsellor and a friend, just like how she managed to transform a secluded student to a top performer in her class during her practicum. This shows that by fulfilling the needs of every individual student, teachers could support their learners and facilitate their growth.

Other than meeting the students’ needs, this study illustrated the pre-service-teachers’ emphasis on the belief that teachers should vary their teaching approaches. Metaphors clustered in this category were ‘chameleon’, ‘explorer’, ‘entertainer’, and ‘magician’. Researchers mainly advocated that teachers should be able to keep themselves updated with innovative ways of teaching to meet the needs of students ([Guerrero & Villamil, 2002](#)). The role of the facilitator was also reflected in the metaphors through the beliefs that teachers had to “correctly guide students”, “help students to overcome difficulties”, and “sacrifice to lead students”. This finding is in line with [Hasim et al. \(2013\)](#) who also found that ‘teacher as a facilitator’ is one of the most prominent categories in their study of 72 trainee teachers in Malaysia. [Farrell](#)

(2016) produced a similar finding with ‘teacher as a facilitator’ being the most popular theme used by the participants of the study.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings discussed above, it can be concluded that the two study objectives are achieved as the findings showed that: first, metaphor is a useful tool to reflect on teaching. Through a critical reflection, participants of the study were able to customize their metaphors depending on particular situations that they were in during their teaching practicum. Second, the study provides significant insights into the teachers’ beliefs and practices through metaphors. It is clear from the study that the pre-service teachers have a strong belief in student-centredness with the three most common roles represented 1) meeting students’ needs, 2) varying teaching approaches, and 3) facilitating students. These conceptions reflect the belief that teachers should prioritize the students.

Even though this study is of value, it is not without limitations. First, the study only relied on the pre-service teachers’ stated beliefs in their reflective task and interview, which may not reflect their true beliefs. There was no evidence to support how their choice of metaphors reflect their actual teaching practice. Secondly, this study only represented three voices of pre-service teachers. For this reason, it cannot be assumed that the experiences or beliefs of PT1, PT2, and PT3 are typical of other pre-service teachers’ beliefs in Malaysia.

These results invite further investigation into the relationship between pre-service teachers’ beliefs and practices. Furthermore, it would also be useful to study pre-service teachers’ teaching metaphors and beliefs concerning more specific aspects like the nature of language learning, the use of L1, motivation, anxiety, or autonomy. The implications of this study are for teacher educators to utilize metaphors in teacher education programmes and acknowledge pre-service teachers’ beliefs as this may profoundly impact the practices and development of beginning teachers.

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